

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

December 1, 2021

The Honorable Denis McDonough
Secretary of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20402

Dear Secretary McDonough,

As bipartisan Co-Chairs of the Congressional Cannabis Caucus, we are pleased to learn the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is considering a change in policy to allow for access to medical cannabis for VA patients. We implore your agency to act swiftly and implement this change as soon as possible.

As you know, 11-20% of veterans who served in Operations Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Enduring Freedom (OEF) experience PTSD, 12% of Desert Storm servicemembers suffer from the disease, while 30% of Vietnam veterans are estimated to be suffering as well.^[1]

Further, according to research by Air Force Captain Carl Beyer at the University of California Davis Medical Center and the David Grant Air Force Medical Center at Travis Air Force Base, nearly 15% of those wounded in combat developed persistent opioid use, and a total of 6.7% went on to opioid abuse.^{[2][3]} A report within the U.S. National Library of Medicine National Institutes of Health found “fifty percent of chronic non-cancer pain patients at the VHA [Veterans Health Administration] received at least one opioid prescription each year between 2009 and 2011. Compared to the general U.S. population, VHA patients had nearly twice the rate of fatal accidental poisoning and opioid use disorder is seven times higher among VHA patients compared to private health plans. Greater risk of opioid use within the VHA than in the broader health system can be explained by the fact that VHA patients are more likely to suffer from chronic pain (50% do so) and more of its patients have psychiatric comorbidities”^[4]

[1]

https://www.ptsd.va.gov/understand/common/common_veterans.asp#:~:text=These%20types%20of%20events%20can%20lead%20to%20PTSD,or%20OEF%20have%20PTSD%20in%20a%20given%20year.

[2] <https://www.militarytimes.com/pay-benefits/2019/10/14/combat-troops-at-higher-risk-for-opioid-heroin-addiction-study-says/>

[3] <https://www.addictionhope.com/blog/addiction-military-members-combat-present-higher-risk/#:~:text=Air%20Force%20Captain%20Carl%20Beyer%2C%20who%20works%20with,for%20those%20who%20have%20been%20injured%20in%20battle.>

[4]

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5975154/#:~:text=Compared%20to%20the%20general%20US,compared%20to%20private%20health%20plans>

Given these staggering statistics, your agency has no time to waste in exploring alternative opioid and PTSD therapies.

Research has shown that cannabis can be safe and effective in targeted pain-management. Additionally, cannabis has proven benefits in managing PTSD and other health issues, including multiple sclerosis (MS) and seizure disorders. Despite its efficacy, antiquated bureaucratic red-tape continues to deny veterans these life-altering treatments. Congress and several administrations have enacted various well-intentioned intervention attempts, however, over twenty veterans continue to die by suicide each day – it is past time we stop barring access from these innovative therapies. We therefore respectfully urge you to ensure no veteran can be denied medically prescribed cannabis treatments.

America's veterans have risked life and limb to preserve our freedoms, so we must not allow the unnecessary politicization of medical cannabis to hinder their lifesaving therapies. We stand ready to work with you and your administration in advancing these necessary treatments.


Sincerely,



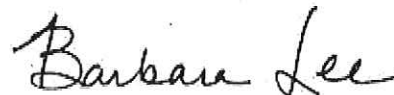
Rep. David P. Joyce
Co-Chair, Congressional Cannabis Caucus



Rep. Earl Blumenauer
Co-Chair, Congressional Cannabis Caucus



Rep. Don Young
Co-Chair, Congressional Cannabis Caucus



Rep. Barbara Lee
Co-Chair, Congressional Cannabis Caucus